

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY



Policy Summary

The purpose of this operational policy is to ensure all possible actions are taken to protect children from abuse and neglect. It includes our protocols when child abuse is reported to us, or is suspected by us. It also includes practice guides on measures to be taken to prevent child abuse. All Staff and families are expected to be familiar with this policy and abide by it. This policy is consistent with Oranga Tamariki (Ministry for Children), the NZ Police guidelines and future revisions will be checked for consistency with these organisations. The policy is designed to meet Ministry of Education Early Childhood Education Licensing Criteria HS31 and provisions of the Children's Act 2014.

Issue Outline

This policy outlines our commitment to child protection and emphasises the safety of the children under the Vulnerable Children's Act 2014.

We have an obligation to ensure the wellbeing of children in our care and are committed to the prevention of child abuse and neglect and to the protection of all children. The safety and wellbeing of the child is our top priority.

We support families/whānau to protect their children.

We provide a safe environment, free from physical, emotional, verbal or sexual abuse.

Our centre is committed to work with other agencies where necessary to respond to the needs of vulnerable children and families/Whānau.

For the purpose of this policy, abuse is used in the context of adult to child. This could be staff to child or an adult (outside of the centre) to the child.

Abuse relating to child-to-child or child-to-adult is not within the scope of this policy.

Definitions

Child Abuse is defined by the Ministry of Children, Oranga Tamariki as "any child or young person that has been, or is likely to be, harmed (whether physically, emotionally, mentally or sexually), ill-treated, abused, neglected or deprived".

Child Abuse can be:

- Physical Abuse
- Emotional Abuse
- Verbal Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Neglect

Child Neglect "is a pattern of behaviour which occurs over a period of time and results in impaired functioning or development of a child. It is the failure to provide for a child's basic needs".

Neglect may be:

- Physical - failure to provide necessary basic needs of food, shelter, clothing or warmth
- Medical - failure to seek, obtain or follow through with medical care for the child
- Abandonment - leaving a child young person in any situation without arranging necessary care for them and with no intention of returning
- Neglectful supervision – failure to provide developmentally appropriate or legally required supervision
- Refusal to assume parental responsibility - unwillingness or inability to provide appropriate care for a child.

Policy Principles

- The interest and protection of the child is paramount in all actions.
- Children have a fundamental right to have all their needs met and to be safe from abuse and neglect.
- We recognise the rights of the family/whānau to participate in the decision-making about their children.
- We have a commitment to ensure that all staff are able to identify the signs and symptoms of potential abuse and neglect and are able to take appropriate action in response.
- We are committed to supporting all staff to work in accordance with this policy, to work with partner agencies and organisations to ensure child protection policies are consistent and high quality.
- We will always comply with relevant legislative responsibilities.
- We are committed to share information in a timely way and to discuss any concerns about an individual child with colleagues or the Centre Manager.
- We are committed to promote a culture where staff feel confident that they can constructively challenge poor practice or raise issues of concern without fear of reprisal.
- Visitors and parents of **other** children should not perform care-taking tasks with children, such as nappy changing, taking children to the toilet at preschool or during excursions.

Parents/Caregivers/Whānau will be supported in ensuring their child is safe and protected from harm:

- We make our child protection policy available to all parents and prospective parents.
- Parents will be informed about their child's programme participation and may visit without any reason to be with their child and observe the programme. If the Centre is closed or has restricted entry visits will need to be arranged.
- Our programme for children includes listening to children and empowering children at an appropriate level about how to keep themselves safe from harm and developing an increased sense of responsibility for the protection of others from physical and emotional abuse (Te Whāriki Well-being goal 3).
- We ask parents to communicate any concerns they might have about how we care for their child and all concerns are taken seriously and acted upon immediately by the manager or supervisors until resolved. (Refer complaints policy).
- If any parent is concerned about an individual's handling of a child they are encouraged to make this known to the centre manager who will investigate and act upon the matter using an advisor from an outside agency if necessary.

Training Supervision and Support

This policy will be a part of the initial staff induction programme. Training, resources and/or advice will be available to ensure that all staff can carry out their roles in terms of this policy, particularly:

- Understanding child abuse and indicators of child abuse (see attached table).
- How to reduce the risk of child abuse.
- Understanding and complying with legal obligations in regard to child abuse.
- Planning of environment and supervision to minimise risk.
- Dealing with child/family/whānau.
- Displaying information for families students and staff.

We also encourage our staff to talk to someone experienced, for a different point of view, or for ideas about how to help. We also have these contacts readily displayed on our noticeboard and in newsletters:

Parent Help – 0800 568 856

Oranga Tamariki – 0508 326 459

Are You OK – 0800 456 450 (Family Violence Information Line)

PlunketLine on 0800 933 922.

See Ministry of Education child abuse information on:

http://www.lead.ece.govt.nz/~media/Educate/Files/Reference%20Downloads/Lead/Files/final_Protocol_MoECYF2.pdf

Further information can be found on:

www.mvcot.govt.nz

Children's Act 2014 and associated regulations.

*specified agency is defined to include the NZ Police; Ministry of Health; Oranga Tamariki; Worksafe NZ, and the Teaching Council.

Protected Disclosure:

- When a staff member or associate brings a case of child abuse to the attention of the centre or the authorities, our centre will not disclose the name of the person without their permission unless it is to Oranga Tamariki or the Police and is necessary to do so in the interests of the child.

Detail:

The centre manager will:

- Always prioritise the safety and wellbeing of the child
- Maintain confidentiality. Failure of staff to comply with this policy will be regarded as serious misconduct
- Maintain and increase staff awareness of how to prevent, recognise and respond to abuse, including learning about appropriate touching
- Work in partnership with parents and caregivers to increase awareness by policy review, sharing regulation changes and providing appropriate information as needed.
- Carry out staff safety checking (including Police Vetting) in accordance with the Children's (Requirements for Safety Checks of Children's Workers) Regulations 2015
- Give no persons, other than employed staff over the age of 17 years, tasks that involve nappy changing, toileting or responsibility for the supervision of children
- Ensure that staff and other adults visiting or working in the centre are well supported and visible in the activities they perform with children. While the centre respects the privacy of our children, staff and visitors, visibility will be given priority to ensure the safety of all concerned
- Respond appropriately to a child who initiates physical contact in seeking affection, reassurance or comfort. It is not appropriate to force any form of unwanted affection/touching on a child. Touching should not be initiated to gratify adult needs. Physical contact during the changing or cleansing of children must be for the purpose of that task only and not be more than is necessary for the job
- Ensure no child is taken from the centre by any staff member or adult, without the permission of a parent, except in the case of an emergency where clearance has been obtained from the Manager.
- Maintain appropriate records
- Ensure the centre procedures protect staff from unjustified allegations of abuse

- Ensure the centre has age appropriate educational and informational resources for children and adults on child abuse
- Should a neglect or abuse situation occur or come to the attention of the centre, and should a report/referral to Oranga Tamariki or the Police be made, the centre is also under an obligation to report the matter to the Ministry of Education (HS34).

Staff Will:

- Always prioritise the safety and wellbeing of the child
- Familiarise themselves with this centre policy
- Immediately notify the Manager or Trust Staff Liaison if they observe signs of child abuse or anyone reports to them any suspicions of child abuse of children at the centre, or a pattern of neglect or concerns is identified
- Maintain confidentiality. Failure of staff to comply with this policy will be regarded as serious misconduct
- Respond appropriately to a child who initiates physical contact in seeking affection, reassurance or comfort. It is not appropriate to force any form of unwanted affection/touching on a child. Touching should not be initiated to gratify adult needs. Physical contact during the changing or cleansing of children must be for the purpose of that task only and not be more than is necessary for the job
- Never take a child from the centre without the permission of a parent, except in the case of an emergency where clearance has been obtained from the Manager

Alignment with other policies:

- Concerns and Problems policy
- Employment policy
- Police Vet policy
- Outings and Excursions policy
- Privacy Act 2020
- Centre Philosophy
- Developing Social Competence in Children policy

Relevant Background (legislation/regulation references):

Regulation 46 Health and Safety Practices standard: general (1) of the Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008.

Licensing Criteria for Early Childhood Education and Care Centres 2008 Health and Safety practices criterion 31 and 32.

Licensing Criteria 2008, Health and Safety, Child Protection documentation required:

- HS31: A process for the prevention of child abuse and a procedure for responding to suspected child abuse. Documents are consistent with Oranga Tamariki or NZ Police guidelines.
- HS32: All practicable steps are taken to protect children from exposure to inappropriate material (for example, of an explicitly sexual or violent nature)
- HS33: No person on the premises uses, or is under the influence of, alcohol or any other substance that has a detrimental effect on their functioning or behaviour during the service's hours of operation.
- HS34: Where there is a serious injury or illness or incident involving a child while at the service that is required to be notified to a specified agency, the service provider must also notify the Ministry of Education at the same time.

Impacts of Policy on Staff, Parents and Children

Information, discussion, trusting relationships and clear procedures will strengthen the ability of staff, parents and children to work together to adequately protect all the children who attend the centre.

Implications and/or Risks for the centre

Failure to protect children will not only lead to lifelong damage for children, it will also seriously damage the reputation of the centre, its staff and the reputation of early childhood centres.

Implementation

We build discussions into enrolment procedures and staff meetings.

Review

This policy will be reviewed every 2 years or when there is a significant change in the area of the policy topic.

Identifying possible abuse or neglect:

The physical and behavioural signs, symptoms and history listed below, may indicate abuse or neglect. However they are not specific to abuse or neglect. In certain situations, contexts and combinations they may indicate other conditions. All signs must be examined in the total context of the child or young person's situation.

The Child				
Consider physical, emotional and sexual abuse and neglect				
Recognise disclosure as a sign of abuse				
Recognise Physical Signs	Record Parent, Caregiver or family signs	Observe Behavioural Signs	Child/family Vulnerabilities	Identify Developmental Signs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bruises and welts • Cuts and abrasions • Scalds and burns • Fractures • Head injuries • Sexually transmitted infections • Failure to thrive and malnutrition • Dehydration • Inadequate hygiene and clothing • Poisoning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposure to family violence • Unrealistic expectations • Terrorising • Corrupting • Isolating • Humiliating • Dependency • Closure • Flight 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aggression • Withdrawal • Anxiety, fear and regression • Sadness • Overly responsible • Obsessions • Substance abuse • Suicidal thoughts/ plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addictions • Mental health • ORANGA TAMARIKI history • Age of parents or child • Attachment • Disability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global development delay. • Specific delays: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Motor ○ Attachment ○ Speech and language ○ Social cognitive ○ Vision and hearing ○ Unusual developmental patterns

Issues in the home

Issues in the home that teachers or centre staff might become aware of, that might lead to abuse and neglect include:

- Parents with money problems, being out of work
- Overcrowding or housing struggles
- Parents with stress
- Child with special needs
- Parents isolated from friends, family and whānau
- Parents with a history of depression or other mental illness
- Parents separating.

Early signs that can lead to abuse and or neglect can be:

- Parent has a drug, alcohol or gambling problem
- Parent does not engage with their child or has a difficult relationship with them
- Child doesn't have enough clothes on and is often cold and hungry
- Child has unexplained or changeable emotions (eg, withdrawn or depressed)
- Parents frequently yell at, swear at or shame a child
- Child seems scared of a particular adult.

We understand that abuse within an Early childhood centre could be:

- Adult to adult
- Adult to child
- Child to child

This policy address adult to child abuse. The police can be contacted where appropriate for adult to adult abuse. If one child is abusing another child, it is often

an indication that the abusing child has been abused. Treat this as an indicator and compile information about this child's behaviour over time to look for a pattern. Discuss with a Oranga Tamariki social worker or Plunketline.

Date of policy approval (sign-off)	January 2022
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Date for policy review	January 2024
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Approved by:

Name of signee

Job Title of signee

Employment policy Procedures:

Stepping Stones will undertake their responsibilities under the vulnerable children act 2014.

Stepping Stones recruitment and vetting of staff includes but is not limited to:

- A carefully planned interview process.
- At least 2 referees (not related to the person) being rung and asked questions about each applicants character, strengths and any concerns.
- A copy of relevant qualifications and NZ Teachers Council registration certificate being supplied.
- A police check of core and non-core management, non-teaching staff, non-registered relievers and volunteers.
- Checking of an original primary identity document with photo (eg NZ passport) and a secondary identity document (eg NZ drivers licence).
- Individual Employment Agreements that include agreement to comply with safe practices and a Professional Conduct clause regarding maintaining a high standard of professionalism, honesty, integrity, courtesy and discretion, and procedures of Stepping Stones.
- If there is any suspicion that an applicant might pose a risk to a child, that applicant will not be employed.

Informing parents/whānau of alleged abuse

- Deciding when, and who will inform the parents or caregivers of the alleged abuse, will be the responsibility of the protection services involved i.e. Oranga Tamariki or Police. This will be done in consultation with the centre manager.

Alignment with the Philosophy of Stepping Stones

- This policy is aligned with the centre's philosophy.

Implications and/or Risks for Stepping Stones

- Failure to protect children will not only lead to lifelong damage for children, it will also seriously damage the reputation of the centre, its staff and the reputation of early childhood centres.

Implementation

- We build discussions into enrolment procedures and staff meetings.

Review

- Review annually or when there is a significant change in the area of the policy topic.